

Remarks in a Discussion at Parkersburg South High School in Parkersburg,
West Virginia
May 13, 2004

The President. Thank you all very much. Thanks for coming. Please be seated. First, thanks for the invite. You all got the best seat in the house. At least you got the best view of me. [*Laughter*] I really want to thank you all for coming. I want to thank our panelists for being here, because we're about to have a discussion on how to make sure every person in America can realize their dreams. That's what we're here to talk about: Dreams and how they can be realized; how to make sure the education system works the way every mom and dad, every teacher, every principal, every concerned citizen wants it to work.

And this is the perfect place to come and have a discussion about education, because Parkersburg South is educating the kids. They're doing a fine job here. Tom, I want to thank you. I've spent a lot of time at schools, and there's always a common denominator in excellent schools, and that is you've got a good principal, see—somebody who listens to the teachers, somebody who interfaces with the parents, but somebody who sets high standards, somebody who believes in the best for every child. And I appreciate you taking on a tough job, and I appreciate you doing it well.

I want to thank Bill Niday as well. He's the superintendent here in Wood County. I know something about superintendents, and I know how important they are for education. See, I picked a superintendent of schools to run the Department of Education, the superintendent from Harris County, which is Houston, Texas. I mean, the superintendent is on the frontline of education. They're involved with all aspects of local education. So I picked a man who understands how it works. And the reason I brought a superintendent in from Texas to Washington, because I believe in local

control of schools. I want the people at the local level running the schools.

I appreciate Barbara Fish, from the State board here in West Virginia, for coming. Where are you, Barbara? Thank you for coming. I'm honored you are here. I appreciate what you said. Barbara said to me—I'm going to talk a little bit about No Child Left Behind here in a second. She said, "I love the spirit of No Child Left Behind." See, I love the spirit of Barbara, who understands that by setting high standards and measuring and making sure curriculum works and making sure your dollars are well spent, that we can make sure no child is left behind in America. So thank you for your vision, and thank you for your care.

They're telling me Jimmy Colombo is here, the mayor. Where are you, Mr. Mayor? There you are. I appreciate you coming. Who you got with you? There he is. We'll try to get you a better seat next time, Mayor. [*Laughter*] But thank you for being here. I'm proud you're here. I really appreciate so many of the citizens of this good city coming out and waving, and it means a lot to me. And Mayor, the fact that you're here means a lot too. I appreciate you serving your community. Just make sure you fill the potholes. [*Laughter*]

I appreciate the Patriots. All of the Patriots are here. Thank you for hosting us. I want to congratulate the seniors who are getting ready to graduate. Make sure you don't take the foot off the gas pedal too soon—isn't that right? Keep studying until the final bell rings. But good luck to you.

Today I had the honor of meeting Heather Stout. She came out to the airport. She's a sophomore at West Virginia University in Parkersburg. I'll tell you why I mention her. Where are you, Heather? She's somewhere. Oh, there you are, right there. I'm sorry. I beg your pardon. You know

what? The reason I bring her up is she's a tutor. She is a math tutor for fourth grade students. Here's a person going to college who has taken time out of her life to help children learn math.

Listen, we talk a lot about the strength of our country, and I'm going to spend a little time talking about the strength of our—a lot of the strengths of the country. But the true strength of this country is the hearts and souls of the American people. That's the strength of America. We're strong because there are good people willing to teach. We're strong because there are good citizens willing to love a neighbor just like they'd like to be loved themselves. See, there are people who hurt in our country, but that hurt can change as a result of a loving citizen saying, "What can I do to help?" See, societies change one heart, one soul, one conscience at a time. That's how societies change, and that happens when people like Heather, and I'm sure people here in this crowd, are willing to take a little time to love and spread compassion.

The reason I mention Heather is because I want people in this good part of the country to do everything they can to help the lonely, to feed the hungry, to find shelter for those who are looking for a place to stay. Heather, thanks for the example you've set. Thanks for having such a good heart, and thanks for following your heart.

One of the things that I'm so proud of is the United States military. I'm proud—[applause]—thank you all for coming. Thank you all. Corporal Ferguson, where's—there he is. Lance Corporal Ferguson—excuse me. He just came back from Iraq. He was one of over 200,000 men and women who have served this Nation. And the reason I bring him up—I want to say a couple of things—thank you, go ahead and be seated. I appreciate you being here. Thank you for your service. And that's Joe Ellison—yes, Lance Corporal Ellison is with him too. I didn't mean to

leave you out, but thank you for your service too.

Let me say a couple of things that you need to know. First, our men and women are serving in historic times. We have a duty never to forget the lessons of September the 11th, 2001, and when we see a gathering threat—when we see threats, we can no longer hope they go away. We can't hope for the best. We've got to take action. Now, action doesn't necessarily mean use of the military. Action can mean using diplomatic pressure, all kinds of pressures. But the enemy declared war on us. And we must be strong, and we must be diligent, and we must be focused. We must do everything we can to protect our homeland. We've got brave soldiers doing just that.

And we're being tested, see. We're being tested because there are people who cannot stand the thought of free societies growing up in a part of the world that is used to hatred and tyranny. We're being tested because there are coldblooded killers that cannot stand the thought of freedom becoming the norm.

And yet, we know something here in America. We know the power of free societies. See, freedom equals peace. Free societies will be peaceful societies. And we also know that freedom is not America's gift to the world; freedom is the Almighty God's gift to each man and woman in this world.

I want these marines to know that they are serving in historic times. The world is changing for the better. The world will be more free and more peaceful, thanks to the United States of America and our military. These are historic times.

I'll tell you an interesting story to try and put it in perspective. I was having dinner with Prime Minister Koizumi in Tokyo. Laura was with me, by the way. She's doing a great job, fabulous person. And here I was, talking to the Prime Minister of a former enemy. My dad, like many of your relatives, fought in the Pacific in World

War II, and here I was, talking to the Prime Minister of the country against whom we used to fight, a country that had attacked us. And we were talking about how to keep the peace. We were strategizing about how to make sure the Korean Peninsula is nuclear-weapon free.

It was a very interesting conversation. First of all, I like the guy a lot. And secondly, it was a positive conversation, an important conversation, to help keep the peace. Had we not gotten the peace right after World War II, it might have been that I wouldn't be having the conversation with Prime Minister Koizumi. As well during the conversation, I thought about what it would be like for a future American President to be talking to a duly elected leader of Iraq, a free Iraq, a peaceful Iraq, a democratic Iraq, about how to deal with problems future generations will face.

No, these are historic times. We're being tested. People are testing our mettle. And I will not yield to the whims of the few. [Applause] Thank you all. I won't yield because I believe so strongly in what we're doing, and I have faith in the power of freedom to spread its wings in parts of the world that desperately need freedom.

I want to say one other thing about our troops. Like you, I have been disgraced about what I've seen on TV, what took place in the prison. But the actions of a few do not reflect on the fantastic character of the over 200,000 men and women who have served our Nation.

One other thing before we talk about education: It is really important for this country to be wise about how we use our natural resources. And I have asked the Congress to pass a national energy policy so we become less dependent on foreign sources of energy. I've asked the Congress to quit playing politics and get a bill out of the United States Senate to my desk that includes the use of clean coal technologies to make sure we are less dependent. I mean, we're seeing what it means to be hooked on foreign sources of energy

right now. And like you, I'm unhappy about it. But I got a plan, if we can just get some cooperation, so we can make sure we got more supply here at home. That's the way you relieve the pressure from foreign sources—you use what you have in a smart way. And we can do this in this country. We can be wise about how we use our resources, so that the people benefit.

And you got a lot of coal here, and it's an important part of our country's energy mix. And we can use technologies to make sure that coal does what we want it to do, which is to power electricity so people can have reliable sources of electricity for their homes and their businesses.

One of the things we're here to talk about today is how to make sure the workforce is educated. But we'd better make sure we've got an educated energy policy too, so that we can have a workforce that expands.

Now, the best way to make sure we got a workforce that's educated is to start early, before it's too late. The No Child Left Behind Act changed the attitude about monies being spent out of Washington. Listen, we've increased the budgets out of Washington by 49 percent since 2001. That is a healthy increase.

Two things I want to say about that: First of all, it's not the Federal responsibility to fund schools. It's State and local responsibility to fund. You don't want the Federal Government running the school system here. But we can help. We can help with Title I students. We can help with Reading First programs. There are ways for the Federal Government to help, and we are.

Make no mistake about it, we're increasing the budgets at the Federal level, but for the first time we have said, "Since we're spending more money, why don't you show us whether or not the children are learning to read, write, and add and subtract. Why don't you use an accountability system to let everybody know that we're succeeding." And that's what's changed. And this high

school right here is using the accountability system, and the students at this school are meeting the accountability standards.

See, we're setting higher standards. And by the way, if you set low standards, guess what you're going to get? You're going to get lousy results. If you have the attitude that certain children can't learn to read and write and add and subtract, sure enough, certain children won't learn to read and write and add and subtract. So we're raising that bar. We're providing extra money. We're holding people accountable, and we're making sure there's local control of schools. See, the people of Parkersburg can run the schools better than people in Washington, DC, can. That's for certain.

And we're making progress. The reading scores in West Virginia are up. That's really good news. It means the teachers are doing what we expect, and they're working hard, by the way. Being a teacher is a difficult profession, and we need to praise our teachers and thank our teachers.

The test scores are up. That must make everybody feel better. It should. And the reason I can say that is because we're measuring. See, if you don't measure, you say, "I think the test scores are up," or "Maybe the test scores are up." You don't know unless you measure. We're measuring, and the results are good.

But let me tell you a statistic that troubles me: 68 of 100 ninth graders nationwide, only 68 will go to college. We ought to have a goal that says every child, every high school student, finishes high school and is capable of finding a job or capable of going on to college. That ought to be the goal.

And so what we're going to talk about today is not how to make sure elementary school children can read but to make sure that the high school programs raise the bar, intervene when necessary, make sure that money is spent wisely, so that we're educating children that have got the capacity to take over the jobs of the 21st century.

And there's some practical things we can do.

First, there needs to be intervention programs for junior high and high school kids who have been shuffled through without the capacity to read. And we've got a program called Striving Readers Initiative, which is an intervention program based on a curriculum designed out of the University of Kansas, by the way, and it works. And I would urge the good folks of the—the planners here in West Virginia to access the Federal monies that I'm asking Congress to spend on making sure that at the very minimum, a kid has got the capacity to read before they get out of high school.

See, if you can't read, these jobs of the 21st century are going to go begging. If you don't have the capacity to at least read, it's going to be impossible for you—not totally impossible, nearly impossible to get the high-paying, high-productivity jobs that are now being created in America.

Secondly, we need to make sure we get more math and science graduates. It's really important that we emphasize math—besides literacy, math and science—and we're going to talk a little bit about that here in a minute—because math and science programs will be necessary to make sure the skill level is good enough for these new jobs that are being created, that people will be able to fill those jobs as well. And so I've got a plan that provides Federal grants to develop teaching programs, in other words, help schools develop effective math teaching programs.

Thirdly, we need an adjunct teacher program to encourage professionals and experts from math and sciences to teach—in other words, once somebody has finished their career or maybe is looking for a career adjustment, to allow them and encourage them to get in the classroom to spread their skills. We need engineers teaching in high schools. We need scientists teaching in high schools. We need people who have been in the military that have had some engineering experience to come out and

teach in high schools. And we—I'm asking Congress to pass a \$40 million program to encourage the recruitment and training of such teachers.

As well we need to be raising that bar. We're going to talk about advanced placement here in a minute. Advanced placement programs are essential programs for challenging every child. In other words, we need to keep raising the standards. We've got to constantly strive to set big goals so people are reaching for those goals and helping schools make sure that the programs work.

Advanced placement is—I love the program. We're about to talk to an advanced placement teacher who I suspect loves it as well, but there are some difficulties. I think the Federal Government should be spending money to help train teachers to teach advanced placement. See, a lot of school districts say, "Well, I'm interested, but it just doesn't meet our needs right now." Well, it should meet the needs, and therefore, there's Federal money available for teacher training.

And one other aspect: It costs \$80 to take a advanced placement test. Now, that's high for a lot of families. Low-income families will say, you know, "I'd rather spend my 80 somewhere else than taking a test," and there's a lot of missed opportunity. I think the Federal Government ought to help low-income students pay for the fee to take the AP test.

I'm getting there. Our panelists are about to fall out, wondering—all right. As the old guy said, "You're just not a potted plant." [Laughter]

I think we ought to enhance Pell grants for students who take rigorous academic courses. Or as I say, if you're taking a rigorous course load in high school and you qualify for Pell grants, you ought to get an extra \$1,000 on your Pell grant. We're spending money at the Pell grant, and Pell grants are good things. We ought to use the Pell grant system to encourage people to keep raising their sights.

We're going to talk about ways to make sure the Perkins Act, which is the vocational training act, work better. I mean, this act was passed in 1917. We're spending a billion dollars a year. The attitude has got to change from 1917. It kind of—it has some, but as a part of the vocational training courses, there need to be a rigorous focus on English and math and science. We've got to make sure the children have got, oh, yes, the skills that may be taught at the Perkins programs, but they need the basics too. And so in order to make sure the high school programs work all the way around, we need to reform the Perkins program.

We're going to talk about the community college system. I'm a big believer in the community college system. Community college systems are ways to help high school students achieve big goals, and we're going to talk about that. The community college systems are also important to taking older folks that have been in one field and training them for another field.

And we've spent a lot of money at the Federal level to make sure that we're able to match skills with jobs available. I mean, I think—one of the stories I tell is I went to the Mesa Community College in Arizona, and I met a woman who had been a graphic design artist for over a decade. And she then went back to the community college, got help from the Federal Government, and got her associate degree. And in her entry-level job in a high-tech field, she made more in her first year than she had made in her last year. In other words, education will not only help somebody become employable; education will help somebody become more productive, which means higher, higher wages, better job, better availability for work. And that's what we're going to talk about.

So here we go. Big Tom, are you ready?

Thomas Eschbacher. I'm ready to go. [Laughter]

The President. He has got a program here called High Schools That Work, and

we're going to spend some time talking about that. It is a way to introduce a rigorous course schedule into the high school curriculum to challenge people. You may want to talk about that, and you may want to not talk about that, but let her go.

[At this point, Mr. Eschbacher, principal, Parkersburg South High School, made brief remarks.]

The President. Good job. That's why you're no longer the band director. [Laughs]

Mr. Eschbacher. I was pretty good at that too, though.

The President. What were you, tuba?

Mr. Eschbacher. I'm a sax player.

The President. Sax player, right.

Dr. Becky Daniel is with us. She is an AP English teacher. First, Becky has been teaching for 29 years, which is a great credit to you, to be in the classroom for that long. You might want to tell people about the advanced placement program—I suspect some people don't even know what we're talking about—why it's important, how you got into it. Let her go. Thanks for coming.

[Rebecca Daniel, English teacher, Parkersburg South High School, made brief remarks.]

The President. Good job, Becky. Thank you. I love her spirit. See, I like teachers that challenge the soft bigotry of low expectations. In other words, she's saying, "I'm going to keep raising that bar. I'm going to keep challenging." And it must make you feel great to see people achieve what you want them to do. Yes, it's got to.

And I agree with you, I think we need to make sure AP is available for all kids. Part of it is the teacher training; part of it is the fee. I mean, I'm sure you've run into kids who say, "My mother and daddy don't want to spend the money on the fee." And that's not a good enough excuse. We've got to encourage—by the way, AP—listen to what she said—if you pass the

AP, you get through college faster. And that takes a lot of the financial pressure off. I mean, it's not only good in terms of your brain; it's good in terms of your wallet. And so, thanks for doing what you're doing, Becky. I appreciate your spirit.

We've got another teacher with us today. Dave is with us. He is a physics teacher. Here's a guy who was trained to be a chemical engineer? Yes. Then he decided to be a teacher—and both of them noble professions, but here he is now, imparting knowledge. He turned down what I bet was a pretty good career in this part of the world. He said, "I want to teach," and he's a physics teacher.

Tell us what you're seeing. Tell us what you're hearing about sciences. It's essential that people take science in high school. This job base of ours is changing. It's in transition. We're creating new jobs all across the country, and people are going to have to be prepared to succeed in these jobs. These aren't the jobs like we've had in the past. These are better paying jobs, steady work, but require the use of your brain. And part of that base, to be ready for these new jobs, is a science base.

And that's why we have Dave here. Thanks for coming.

[David Foggin, physics teacher, Parkersburg South High School, made brief remarks.]

The President. So, are kids interested? I mean, how do we—are people interested in sciences and math now, do you find?

Mr. Foggin. What I like to do—and Tom can probably attest to this—"All in the name of science," he says—I'll take kids in the hallway, and we'll push them on scooters and talk about force and acceleration. We'll go to the gym and throw medicine balls in the air and talk about potential energy and kinetic energy. We swing on ropes and talk about pendulums and harmonic motion. I try to make things active

and fun and keep science fun, and sometimes you don't even realize you're learning.

The President. Yes, practical—with a practical application.

Mr. Foggin. Yes, a lot of hands on.

The President. One of the things he's talking about is going to businesses—we call them State Scholar programs. We're going to talk about how to get other businesses involved here in a minute. But what businesses are interested in is they want a high school to be ready to—be capable of training people so they can hire them. That's what they want, and so we've got what's called State Scholar programs, which is a collaborative effort between high schools and school districts and businesses to encourage rigorous curriculum that matters. That's kind of what you were doing when you went to the plant. You had business executives say, let us help figure out—

Mr. Foggin. We met with employers all around this area and asked them, "What do you want from employees? Let's see some of your employees." And we spent about a week with them to see exactly what it is they do, what skills they need, and then we all got back together at the end and said, "Hey, everything we saw was"—

The President. See, that's a smart way to run a high school. It's a practical way to run a high school. It says, "Look, we're going to make sure that kids who come out of here not only can read and write, but they're going to have the basis so they can become employees." As this job base expands—and it's expanding—as new jobs are being created, we've got to get it right here in high school.

It starts with making sure kids can read early. I mean—and that's what's happening. It will help when we have intervention programs all around the country to make sure that the literacy levels are high enough to become—so people can at least fill out the forms when it comes to finding work. But

we need to make sure we stay focused on math and science.

And that's why I'm so—I appreciate Dave being here. Thanks for what you do. I love both your spirits, and thanks for teaching. Appreciate you coming.

We've got a man from Atlanta, Georgia, right here sitting next to the President. Gene Bottoms—he is the senior vice president of what's called the Southern Regional Education Board. It is a—well, he can tell you what it is. But he is involved with working with school districts around the country to encourage them to put in place rigorous academic programs. Is that an accurate description?

James E. "Gene" Bottoms. That's a big part of it.

The President. All right. Well, tell them what you do.

[*Mr. Bottoms made brief remarks.*]

The President. Nationally, only 68 percent of the children who start from the ninth grade will graduate from high school on time. In other words, West Virginia is doing really well.

[*Mr. Bottoms made further remarks.*]

The President. Thanks for coming. Good job.

We've got Joe Badgley with us. He is the dean of academic affairs. You still the interim president?

Joseph L. Badgley. Yes, sir.

The President. You're still the interim president, although he named his successor yesterday or today?

Dr. Badgley. My successor was named yesterday.

The President. Yes, we've got you coming and going. Anyway—[laughter]—thanks for coming. He is at West Virginia University at Parkersburg. And tell us about the program you've got here. Just let us—let her go.

[*Dr. Badgley made brief remarks.*]

The President. So what does that mean for a mom or a dad, or what does it mean for the student when that happens?

Dr. Badgley. Well, one of the great things about the program is that many of the high schools choose to give graduation credit so that the students are earning credits toward graduation from high school at the same time they're earning college credit, which is why the program is often referred to as dual credit. And it's important to note that those courses are delivered at deeply discounted tuition rates, which means that students can graduate from high school with as much as a semester of college work completed at a substantial savings to themselves and to their families.

The President. Yes, that's a really smart idea. And how hard is it for the high school students? I mean, if somebody is sitting out there listening who says, "Gosh, I may want to get my child, who's a sophomore in high school, to think about this," is it a steep hill to climb, or is it—obviously, if 900 kids are going, they've had pretty good success passing the courses.

Dr. Badgley. It's a very popular program, and the students—the program is open to high school juniors and seniors who have a 2.8 grade point average and the recommendation of their principal or their counselor to participate in the program.

The President. Yes, that's neat. What are you doing for worker training? Can you share some of the ideas with the citizens here in this community about why you're important and useful and necessary?

[*Dr. Badgley made further remarks.*]

The President. Yes. See, I like to tell people the community college systems are available, affordable, and they're flexible. In other words, they're able to change their

curriculum in order to meet the needs of the job requirements or the job needs here. And it's a really good asset. And the thing that's so impressive about the utilization of this good asset is they hooked up with a high school—high schools here. So people have got all kinds of opportunities.

Listen, I hope you're as optimistic about the future of the country as I am. You just heard some, I think, incredibly positive news about your community. You've got people who are raising the bar, people who are making sure that the course load is relevant to the jobs of the 21st century, people who are using the asset base, the education asset base, in a wise way to make sure that every child has got an opportunity to realize the great promise of the country.

We live in the most fabulous nation on the face of the Earth, and one of the reasons why is because we're a nation that believes in the worth of every person, regardless of their background. We're a nation that believes in the potential of every person. We want every child to learn to read, write, and add and subtract. We want every child to have the curriculum necessary to be able to realize his or her dreams. That's what we want in America.

We're also a great nation because we've got fantastic values. And one of the values we hold dear is the value of freedom. We love our freedom. We understand our freedom. We will never relinquish our freedom.

Thank you all for coming. May God bless.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:58 p.m. in the school's gymnasium. In his remarks, he referred to Lance Cpl. Stephen Ferguson, USMC; and Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi of Japan.

Statement on Senate Passage of Individuals With Disabilities Education Improvement Legislation

May 13, 2004

I am pleased that the Senate passed the “Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act,” which would continue to build on the great progress we have made in helping children with disabilities achieve their full potential. By working together to open doors for citizens with disabilities, we can help fulfill the promise of our great Nation.

This legislation will further promote educational opportunities for children with dis-

abilities. I am committed to working together with students, parents, teachers, schools, and communities to ensure that all children are given every chance to learn and to reach their full potential, including children with disabilities.

I urge the House and Senate to meet in a timely manner in order to reach agreement on a final legislative package that I can sign into law this year.

Remarks at the American Conservative Union 40th Anniversary Gala

May 13, 2004

Thank you all very much. Thanks a lot. I’m honored to join you here for the 40th anniversary of the American Conservative Union. I bring greetings from the A team in my family, Laura Bush. I am a—you got stuck with the junior varsity. *[Laughter]* I’m a lucky man to be married to Laura. She is a fabulous person, great mom, great wife, and I think she deserves 4 more years as the First Lady.

I just left a meeting with our fabulous Vice President, and he sends his best. He’s still pretty proud of his last year in the House, when he received a 100-percent rating from the ACU. He didn’t mention that one when you gave him a 90. *[Laughter]* The ACU doesn’t rate Presidents, but a President can rate you. This is a fine group of decent citizens, principled citizens, and tonight I am proud to stand with the ACU.

And I appreciate my friend David Keene, the chairman. This is his 20th anniversary. He is the longest serving chairman in ACU history. As one of his predecessors said about David’s long tenure, “So long as it’s

not a paying job, he won’t have any competition.” *[Laughter]*

I met David’s daughter, Private 1st Class Lisa Keene. And I’m proud that she is volunteering in the United States Army, but not nearly as proud as her dad.

I appreciate being up here with some fine Members of Congress. Senator Mitch McConnell, the dinner cochair, good to see you, Mitch. Thank you. I see Senator Jim Bunning is here today. Thank you for cochairing this as well. I’m pulling for you in the reelection. I know Chris Cox is here as well. Congressman Cox is a fine Member of the Congress and a good friend. And of course, former ACU chairman—I don’t think he was the guy that gave me that quote, by the way—and that would be Congressman Phil Crane. Appreciate you being here. I see other Members of the Senate and the House who are here. Thanks for coming; good to see you all.

I know members of my administration are here. I see Kay James, who’s the Director of the Office of Personnel Management. I appreciate you being here, Kay. John